

# UNIFIED SPORTS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT VOLLEYBALL

## Official Rules

Official Special Olympics rules for Volleyball apply with the following exceptions and clarifications:

### 1) Roster Size:

- i. Minimum: 5 Special Olympics athletes and 3 Unified partners who serve in the role as on-court “mentor coaches.”
- ii. Maximum: 6 Special Olympics athletes and 4 Unified partners who serve in the role as on-court “mentor coaches.”

### 2) Age requirements:

- i. All players must be of similar age
  1. If any member of a team is between the ages of 8-13, the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team must be no more than 3 years. *For example, if the youngest player is 11, the oldest player cannot be older than 13.*
  2. If any member of a team is between the ages of 14-17, the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team must be no more than 4 years. *For example, if the oldest player is 16, the youngest player cannot be younger than 13.*
  3. If all members of a team are 18 and older, the variance between the youngest and oldest member of the team should be no more than 20 years.

### 3) Coach Requirements:

- i. A non-playing head coach is required. This individual cannot be one of the Unified partners.
- ii. Head Coach must be a SOPA certified Volleyball coach
- iii. All coaches must complete:
  1. Coaching Unified Sports course -
    - a. Free online course, 1 hour: [Coaching Unified Sports Course \(nfhslearn.com\)](https://nfhslearn.com) You will need to create an account. This account and the course are free.
  2. SOPA Unified Sports Player Development Coach Training
    - a. Virtual course – specifics TBD

### 4) Unified Partners Requirements: All Unified partners must complete the following prior to the start of the training season:

- i. SOPA Class A Requirements
  1. Protective Behaviors (16 and over)
  2. General Orientation (16 and over)
  3. Background Clearance (18 and over)
- ii. Athlete Application (Medical)
- iii. SOPA Unified Partner Training
  1. Free online webinar, 30 minutes – specifics TBD
  2. Optional: live additional training and Q&A webinar- TBD

5) **Playing Lineup:**

- i. Each team always has two Unified partners and four Special Olympics athletes on the court.
- ii. The composition of a Unified Player Development team should consist of lower ability Special Olympics athletes who have participated in volleyball Individual Skills or traditional Special Olympics lower division volleyball competition.

6) **Unified partners on the court:**

- i. Unlike Competitive Unified Sports, the partners' ability levels in this program are higher than the athletes. Their primary role is serving as on-court instructors and facilitating play, so the Special Olympics athletes learn how to play volleyball. The partners do not play as peer teammates and are restricted in what they can do on the court.
- ii. Unified partners need to use common sense to restrain themselves from taking the game out of the athletes' hands. The best outcome of a **player development experience** is one where the athletes play, and the Unified partners serve as on-court coaches during practices and competition.
- iii. A Unified partner MAY NOT do the following:
  1. Intentionally return the ball over the net
  2. Serve
  3. Block
  4. Favor one athlete
- iv. Unified partners CAN:
  1. Bump/set the ball to an athlete
  2. Provide continual on-court instruction to their athlete teammates with verbal, visual, and physical cues. These include where to position themselves on the court, how to execute a skill, and overall game tactics.

7) **Rules:**

- i. **Serving:** Only athletes are permitted to serve throughout the game. They can serve from the regulation serve line or a modified serve line can be used for athletes who have difficulty reaching the net. The modified serve line is 15 feet from the net.
- ii. **Rotation:** Unified partners will assist athletes in the proper rotation throughout the game.
  1. Unified partners always will remain in spots 2 and 5 on the court.
  2. Special Olympics Athletes will rotate through spots 1, 3, 4 and 6
- iii. **Returns:** Maximum of 3 touches on each side. The athlete must return the ball over the net.
  1. Partners shall not dominate play. The goal is for athletes to have more touches on the ball than the partners
- iv. **Additional Rules:** Any areas or situations not covered in the Unified Player Development rules will be governed by the Official Special Olympics rules for Volleyball found on the SOI website at [https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/sport-rules/Sports-Essentials-Volleyball-Indoor-Rules-2020.pdf?\\_ga=2.52206446.613978836.1653522252-1341883652.1650655851](https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/sports-essentials/sport-rules/Sports-Essentials-Volleyball-Indoor-Rules-2020.pdf?_ga=2.52206446.613978836.1653522252-1341883652.1650655851)